

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Greek Musical Writings, Vol. 2: Harmonic and Acoustic Theory by Andrew Barker

Review by: E. Kerr Borthwick

Source: *Music & Letters*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Feb., 1991), pp. 69-71

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/736494>

Accessed: 26-02-2020 06:21 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Oxford University Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Music & Letters*

## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

*Greek Musical Writings*, Vol. 2: *Harmonic and Acoustic Theory*. Ed. by Andrew Barker. pp. viii + 581. (Cambridge University Press, 1989 [1990], £55/\$79.50.)

The first volume of Andrew Barker's substantial and impressive contribution to the 'Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music' series — *The Musician and his Art* (1984) — contained a mixed bag of translated portions of musical passages culled from Homeric epic, early lyric poetry, Attic tragedy and comedy and — from prose literature — chiefly excerpts from Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Athenaeus and, most substantially, the *De musica* attributed to Plutarch. All these authors of course exist in English translation elsewhere, but it was most useful for workers in this field, with or without expertise in the Greek language, to have so much of the relevant material brought together, and with substantial annotation.

By contrast, this new volume, *Harmonic and Acoustic Theory*, which contains a high proportion of the formidable technical treatises mostly from the post-classical period, includes a good deal of difficult material which has never before been available in translation (English at least). For it is surprising how little interest the Loeb Classical Library has shown in covering either the shorter *musici scriptores* found in the Greek Teubner text of Karl von Jan (1895) or the three most voluminous extant musical works of Aristoxenus, Ptolemy and Aristides Quintilianus. True, there was the translation by H. S. Macran (1902) of the first-named, but Ptolemy's treatise is now completely available for the first time in English (though there is the German version by Ingemar Düring); and, although quite recently (1983) a translation of Aristides was published by T. J. Mathiesen, this, while containing useful notes, was unfortunately marred by frequent translation errors.

The distribution of works between the two volumes has meant that some authors appear in both. The well-known sections of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics*, which deal with social and ethical views about music, appeared in Vol. 1, but now a few additional technical passages of Plato (especially *Timaeus*) are more appropriately located in Vol. 2. It is perhaps a pity that a curious, and textually problematic, passage of *Philebus* 56a (which Barker himself has written about recently in *Classical Quarterly*, xxxvii (1987), 103–9) is not found in either book. In the case of genuine Aristotle, he has culled a number of passages where the uninformed reader might not expect to find musical references. From other works attributed to him, he includes the interesting *De audibilibus*, and from two of the books (11 & 19) of the *Problemata* (of Peripatetic derivation at least), we find several excerpts here, in addition to those deemed more appropriate to Vol. 1. Indeed two of the *Problems* (19.23 & 39) appear, for some reason, in both volumes, and it is not entirely clear why others have been passed over altogether — including, for example, 19.33, about the note *mesē* as 'leader' of a tetrachord, a statement which used to arouse much interest in books on Greek music. Other, less familiar authors, of interesting, if uneven, content, who now receive their English baptism are Theon of Smyrna, who wrote a work bravely entitled 'Mathematics Useful for Reading Plato'; Nicomachus of Gerasa, whose *Enchiridion* belongs to the Pythagorean tradition; and Porphyrius, parts of whose commentary on Ptolemy are included.

Barker has added also a first translation of a lesser-known piece of Aristoxenus, the extant second book of his *Elementa rhythmica*, which, oddly enough, has been followed within a matter of months by a text, translation and commentary of this same work by Lionel Pearson (reviewed below, pp. 71–74), which, however, has the bonus of adding material, assumed to be Aristoxenian, preserved in the Byzantine writer Michael Psellus, and an interesting fragment from one of the early Oxyrhynchus papyrus discoveries. Mention of Psellus

reminds me that Barker unfortunately seems to have overlooked (since the item is not even mentioned in his substantial bibliography) some novel and striking musical details apparently relevant to the classical period, though unattested in extant older sources, found in the Byzantine treatise on tragedy published by Robert Browning in *Geras: Studies Presented to George Thomson on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday* (1963). These include notably the new term *anatrētos tropos* (literally 'bored through' style), used to characterize ironically a feature of the 'new music' of the avant-garde musicians of the day, which I have explained in Browning's publication, and subsequently in *Hermes*, xcvi (1968), 69–73, with reference to the chromatic *kampai* ('bends') and *murmēkiai* ('ant-tracks') joked about by the comic poets Aristophanes and Pherecrates.

Not all the specifically musical works of the post-classical period have been thought worth including, notably the *Adversus musicos* of Sextus Empiricus (rather a dull piece, though containing a few things of interest, and available in English in the Loeb Library and in a more recent translation by D. D. Greaves) and the *De musica* of Philodemus, which survives partly in carbonized papyrus rolls from Herculaneum. The fragmentary nature of the latter makes its omission understandable, though the fourth book is reasonably substantial and coherent, and has been translated before into Dutch (van Krevelen, 1939) and German (Neubecker—twice misspelt in Barker's bibliography—1986). There is also an Italian translation of the first book by Rispoli (1969). The author(s) known as 'Bellermann's Anonymus' is also omitted, though a few important passages, such as those referring to notation and solmization are accounted for in notes on other authors, notably Aristides Quintilianus; so too is Alypius, whose importance is limited to his providing the most substantial evidence in the literary sources for Greek musical notation. Barker understandably excludes the special area of actual musical documents from papyrus and stone, which confirm such a notation system.

The special problem about what to do with sporadically recorded technical musical material preceding Plato has been well handled here. This of course involves especially the contributions to musical theory attributed to Pythagoras and his mathematical successors, notably Philolaus and Archytas. I dare say that a great many people, who turn to the Greek theorists expecting to be gratified by learning about the actual music so highly praised for its beauty or moral value (or deplored for its depravity) by the better-known philosophic writers, are disappointed, or even repelled, when they plough through pages of descriptions of scales based on numerical ratios, and begin to wonder whether these writers ever listened to music or actually enjoyed the sound of it. (Even the great Ptolemy proves most disappointing in this respect.) But in an interesting appendix analysing three such passages attributed to Archytas' 'scalar divisions', Barker tries to show that, in preferring the 5:4 ratio for the major third, which makes the upper interval of an enharmonic tetrachord, to the strict Pythagorean 81:64 ditone, Archytas had taken into account the fact that practising musicians, however strict their 'tuning by concordances' might be, 'sweetened' the interval and made it 'more aesthetically agreeable' by a slight tightening of the lower-pitched string, and was thus 'seriously concerned to represent systems belonging to real musical practice'. (It is, incidentally, maddening how uncertain we remain, in spite of all the extant works of the Greek musical writers, about the blowing and fingering of the aulos or the tuning and playing of the lyre or kithara.) Another appendix of Barker's at the end of Ptolemy's second book struggles with his account of attunements of string instruments, presumably of his own age. I do not recall noticing any mention of one offhand allusion, in the second-century rhetorical Dio Chrysostom (68.7), about tuning the remaining strings from the 'middle note' *mesē*.

Many would readily trade in some of the less interesting or repetitive of Jan's *musici scriptores* (and Barker excludes from his choice of works Bacchius, Cleonides and Gaudentius) for substantial fragments of a pair of earlier important names who lurk in the background of the extant authorities. One is Lasus of Hermione: only small quotations from this sixth-century BC poet and musical innovator remain, though unfortunately none of his so-called asigmatic poems. When Barker mentions the existence of this rather bizarre type of composition (the Greeks seem to have had some aesthetic dislike of sibilants in musical performance), he might have referred to a papyrus fragment of some 60 such trimeters published

not long ago (see E. G. Turner in *Museum helveticum*, xxxiii (1976), 1-23). The other is Damon, the enigmatic, but certainly influential, friend and adviser of Pericles and Socrates, to whom Plato (with unusual deference) assigns such importance in musical education. A glance at Barker's index shows how often his name recurs. However, evidence of any actual written works by him is unclear, though Aristides seems to have had access to attributable material, and it is likely enough that the latter's obsessive preoccupation with a significant difference between male and female elements in music goes back to Damon. It is Aristides, I think, who, for all his quirkiness and his astrological and numerological speculations, will probably most interest readers of this excellently annotated volume, and may result in more attention being directed towards a valuable and neglected author.

To sum up, Dr Barker has produced a most useful aid both for classical scholars and for Greekless readers interested in the history of music; for, while any Greek words quoted are transliterated and glossed for non-specialists, at many points the notes contain detailed discussion of textual problems, and occasionally his own readings, which differ from the currently available Greek texts.

E. KERR BORTHWICK

*Elementa rhythmica*. By Aristoxenus. Ed. by Lionel Pearson. pp. liv + 98. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, £25. ISBN 0-19-814051-7.)

The most important relics of ancient Greek music are not the sorry handful of surviving scores but our very considerable collection of poems that were originally designed to be sung. Pride of place should arguably be given to the great choral lyrics of the archaic and classical periods, whose history reaches a climax in the works of Pindar, Bacchylides and the Attic tragedians. Their words often give direct information about their own performance, and further insights can be gleaned from investigations of their aesthetic and formal properties. Among these the most clearly accessible is metre; and the metres of Greek lyric have been the focus of formidable amounts of painstaking analysis. Their intricacies have fascinated scholars and appalled generations of Classics students, faced with the drudgery of exercises in scansion. Modern studies have reached a high level of technical sophistication, sometimes coupled with admirable sensitivity (see for instance A. M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama*, Cambridge, 1968, and M. L. West, *Greek Metre*, Oxford, 1982). But in the wake of some misguided efforts in the nineteenth century, the related but distinct subject of rhythm has been largely ignored. In particular, the mode of rhythmic analysis developed by Aristoxenus (towards the end of the fourth century BC) has commonly been dismissed as 'mere theory', irrelevant to the realities of Greek poetic structure.

The difference between metre and rhythm, in Aristoxenus' sense, is not recondite or obscure. The building-blocks of metre are syllabic lengths, long and short. Metrical analysis identifies and classifies the repeatable patterns formed by combinations of them, and studies the ways in which these patterns are used, developed, modified and related to one another in actual examples of poetry. Such analysis leaves us in no doubt of the importance of these patterns of lengths in the work of poets like Pindar and Sophocles. Their metrical systems are complex, subtle and extraordinarily varied (no two of Pindar's odes, for instance, have the same metrical scheme). At the same time they are far from being metrically 'free': each is strictly constructed within a tight organization of its own, and the metrical patterns are held rigorously constant in each of the responding strophes of any one piece. Metre inheres in the words, and consists in an ordering of syllabic lengths. Rhythm, by contrast, does not emerge directly from any arrangement of long and short syllables. It is concerned with stress. A rhythmic analysis would identify the places in a line where stresses fall and where syllables are lightened, and would pick out the patterns formed by sequences of stress and relaxation. In Aristoxenian theory, stress and relaxation occupy time. Where they occur in a sequence of words, each occupies a syllable or group of syllables of some length, which is measured by reference to a notionally minimal syllabic duration. Thus in one sort of rhythm, stresses occupying some number of these durations are regularly followed by relaxations of the same length, while in others the ratio between their lengths may be 2:1 or 3:2 or